

# LEADING EDGE

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*REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE*  
*AUSTHORPE PRIMARY SCHOOL*  
*REPORT – 18<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015*

## **THE PROCESS**

Our Review of Governance is a non-threatening, developmental process involving guided discussions rather than questionnaire answer, supported by reviewing a number of key school documents to further inform our conversations and understanding of the school.

Qualitative analysis of the content of discussions is triangulated and forms the basis of this report structured to meet the needs of the school and raise suggestions for further action and development.

Following an initial scoping meeting with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015, a document review was undertaken. The documents reviewed included:

- Latest Ofsted report and letter
- Ofsted data dashboard
- Instrument of Government
- School Self-Evaluation documentation
- School Improvement Plan
- School prospectus/website
- Governance structures, committee work programmes and terms of reference
- Governing Body and committee agendas & minutes
- Governance development Plan
- Headteacher's reports to Governing Body

The document review was followed on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015 by guided discussions with 9 of the 11 current members of the Governing Body, including the Headteacher, plus an Associate Governor together with the Deputy Headteacher designate. A further review of documentation was also conducted.

## **VISION, ETHOS & STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

### ***Strengths***

1. Governors share a strong commitment to the aims and ethos of the school and the Governing Body has been able to contribute to the development of these.
2. Governors share an ambition for the school to become outstanding in Ofsted's judgement.
3. The School Improvement Plan (SIP) was the subject of a special meeting of the Governing Body in Autumn Term 2014; it is used regularly by governors as the basis for reporting and discussion of progress.

### ***Areas for Development***

4. Given the relatively high proportion of new governors, the Governing Body may benefit from an opportunity to re-visit the aims and ethos of the school, in order to ensure a shared purpose is maintained and strengthened.
5. There is some excellent practice where the priorities of the SIP have underpinned the work of the Governing Body. Governors should strive to ensure this approach is deployed consistently across its work.
6. A review by the Governing Body of its processes for developing, monitoring and evaluating the SIP and the Governance Development Plan would ensure that all governors, include recent appointments, understood those processes and the rationale underpinning them.

## **EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE & STATUTORY DUTIES**

### ***Strengths***

7. The Governing Body has reconstituted recently and has been careful to bring together Governors with a strong range of skills, relevant experience and understanding of the local community.
8. Governors reported that agendas and papers were issued in a timely fashion prior to meetings.
9. Governors reported that over time meetings provided good focus on school issues and were not usually dominated by "business" items.
10. Governing Body minutes provide clear evidence of challenge.
11. Governors have established a coherent committee structure with clear and appropriate terms of reference, to enable business to be dealt with effectively and efficiently.
12. Induction and training of new governors has been improved as a result of learning from the wider Temple Newsam Learning Partnership.
13. The Governing Body has conducted a self-review of its effectiveness and has its own Development Plan which is, in turn, related to the School improvement Plan.
14. A policy review schedule is in place.
15. A Governor Skills Audit has been undertaken and used to inform the recruitment and deployment of governors.
16. Governors report that support from the Clerk is highly effective and focussed upon continuous improvement of governance.

### ***Areas for Development***

17. The Governing Body should clarify the procedures for the appointment of Committee Chairs, integrating this with their strategy for succession planning.
18. In order to ensure consistency of approach, the Governing Body may wish to clarify expectations of governor link roles and record these in an appropriate protocol.
19. Some Committee minutes do not offer evidence of Governor support and challenge or clear identification of governor decisions.

20. Whilst arrangements for the induction of new governors have improved significantly recently, these should continue to be developed through reflection on the experience of its new governors. Support from a “buddy” governor for new governors should also be considered as a more formal part of this process.

## **MONITORING & EVALUATION**

### ***Strengths***

21. Governors report a good and productive working relationship between the Governing Body and the recently appointed Headteacher.
22. Whilst there is a core of governors who are able to confidently interrogate pupil data, all governors regularly consider and challenge data relating to pupil attainment and progress. The whole Governing Body recently considered the Ofsted Data Dashboard.
23. Governors report that the Governing Body has a culture in which it is easy to ask questions to challenge the school.
24. Governors are provided with a range of relevant data and information by the Headteacher and SLT (senior leadership team).
25. Several Governors are particularly well-equipped to provide challenge, especially on pupil performance and investment issues.
26. Over time, governors have received reports from a number of different members of staff.
27. Governors complete brief reports on their monitoring visits to school and report back to the Governing Body.

### ***Areas for Development***

28. Continuing the development of governor confidence in the use of data, through the way this is presented and discussed in meetings and, where appropriate, attending relevant training.
29. Continuing to develop governor confidence in questioning and, in particular, offering challenge related to impact on pupil outcomes.
30. Continuing the development (already initiated) of governor reports on monitoring visits, so that learning can be shared more consistently.
31. More developed engagement with stakeholders (see below) would provide further evidence for triangulating evaluations of the school, by identifying the perceptions of parents and pupils.

## **STRENGTHENING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP (SUPPORT & CHALLENGE)**

### ***Strengths (see also section 3 above)***

32. There is a strong relationship of trust between Governors and the Headteacher.
33. Governors are very aware of their role in holding the school to account and ensuring that the school's thinking is tested effectively.
34. The Chair of Governors is very active, visiting school regularly and managing meetings effectively to ensure proper focus on school issues.
35. The Chair, Vice-chair and Headteacher meet together to discuss issues arising from the school and the work of the Governing Body.

### ***Areas for Development (see also section 3 above)***

36. To further improve the strategic leadership of the Governing Body, governors should also consider regular, structured meetings of governor leaders to plan agendas and ensure strategic co-ordination of the Governing Body's work. For example, the practice of meetings of the Chair, Vice-chair and Headteacher could be more focused on planning the work of the Governing Body. Depending upon the appointment of Chairs

of Committees, they might join this group on at least a termly basis so that the work of committees and the schedule of governor visits were fully integrated into an overall plan of activity. This development would also assist with succession planning for governor leadership roles.

## **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OF THE HEADTEACHER & STAFF**

### ***Strengths***

37. The performance management of the Headteacher is carried out in line with statutory requirements, though participation in this is currently limited to the Chair. The Headteacher and Chair are supported by an external adviser who is well-qualified for the role.
38. Governors receive clear and regular reports on the quality of teaching at the school through the Headteacher's Report and they provide challenge on the action taken to improve quality.

### ***Areas for Development***

39. Perhaps as a result of the relatively recent appointment of a number of governors, shared understanding of the process of performance management of the Headteacher is limited. The Governing Body should take urgent steps to establish a properly constituted Performance Management Committee.
40. The Performance Management Committee (or another) should also focus on the effectiveness of the (teacher) appraisal process over the year, including considering examples of anonymised teacher objectives to ensure that these are related to pupil progress, school improvement priorities and are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-related) and maintaining an overview of the consistency and fairness of the appraisal process.

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

### ***Strengths***

41. The School regularly conducts parental surveys, the results of which are shared with governors.
42. There are some good examples of engagement with pupils, for example twice yearly meetings at which members of the School Council report to the Governing Body.
43. All governors are allocated a class link, which they follow through school.
44. Governors regularly engage in discussion with pupils during their monitoring visits to school.
45. The Chair issues a regular newsletter to parents.
46. Governors report a strong, active and beneficial partnership working within the Temple Newsam Learning Partnership.

### ***Areas for Development***

47. Governors should consider how their approach to communicating/engaging with stakeholders, including pupils and parents, might become more strategic, integrated and pro-active. This might commence with consideration of why governors want to engage with stakeholder groups over the coming year, related to school improvement activities.

**MATCHING RESOURCES TO VISION & PRIORITIES**

***Strengths***

- 48. Governors are well-informed about spending on the Pupil Premium and have considered the impact of this funding.
- 49. Governors compare general areas of spending with national benchmarks on an annual basis.
- 50. Skills which the governors bring, contribute to effective discussion and analysis of costs and benefits in making investment decisions.

***Areas for Development***

- 51. Governors should ensure that they systematically plan for evaluation of outcomes when taking investment decisions, forward planning the timing of such evaluation.

## **KEY AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT – SUMMARY**

The membership of the Governing Body has changed over the last year and it contains a strong mix of skills, experience and knowledge. Its members are clearly committed and take a professional approach to the school's governance, balanced with a caring attitude towards the school and its community. The Governing Body also displays much good/excellent practice. Given the relatively large proportion of its members who are new, one challenge it faces is ensuring that understanding of the reasons underlying its various approaches are commonly shared. Another is ensuring that its good practice is sustained and developed in the medium to long term through effective succession planning.

### **Key Areas for Development**

To clarify expectations of members of the Governing Body and of some working practices:

- Re-visit the aims and ethos of the school in order to ensure a shared purpose is maintained and strengthened (para. 5).
- Review the Governing Body's processes for developing, monitoring and evaluating the SIP and the Governance Development Plan to ensure that all governors, understand those processes and the rationale underpinning them (para. 6).
- Clarify the procedures for the appointment of Committee Chairs and integrate this with a strategy for succession planning (para. 17).
- Clarify expectations of governor link roles and record these in an appropriate protocol (para. 18).
- Ensure all Committee minutes offer evidence of Governor support and challenge or clear identification of governor decisions (para. 19).
- Continue to develop the induction process through reflection on the experience of its new governors, including considering formalizing support from a "buddy" governor (para. 20).
- Continue the development of governor reports on monitoring visits, so that learning can be shared more consistently (para. 30).
- Ensure that the evaluation of outcomes is systematically planned for when taking investment decisions (para. 51).

To further strengthen school leadership and sustain governor leadership roles:

- Consider regular, structured meetings of governor leaders to plan agendas and ensure strategic co-ordination of the Governing Body's work (para. 36).

To further increase the Governing Body's effectiveness in holding the Headteacher to account:

- Strive to ensure the excellent practice of School Improvement Plan priorities underpinning its work is deployed consistently across the work of the Governing Body (para. 6).
- Continue to development governor confidence in the use of data (para. 28).
- Continue to develop governor confidence in questioning and, in particular, offering challenge related to impact on pupil outcomes (para. 29).
- Take urgent steps to establish a properly constituted Performance Management Committee (para. 39).
- Ensure a Committee remit includes a focus on the effectiveness of the (teacher) appraisal process over the year (para. 40).

To further increase the Governing Body's effectiveness in engaging with stakeholders:

- Consider how their approach to communicating/engaging with stakeholders, including pupils and parents, might become more strategic, integrated and pro-active, enabling the provision of further evidence for triangulating evaluations of the school, by identifying the perceptions of parents and pupils (paras. 31 & 47).